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NEW RESEARCHES ON POTTERY WORKSHOPS IN AKRAGAS. EXCAVATIONS IN THE ARTISANAL AREA OUTSIDE GATE 5 (EXCAVATION 2019)

Vincenzo Baldoni, Maria Concetta Parello, Michele Scalici

The research on the craft areas in Agrigento has been recently undertaken by a team from the University of Bologna, in cooperation with the Archaeological and Landscape Park of the Valley of the Temples. This project focused on a sector of the kerameikos quarter of the ancient Akragas, partially excavated between the 1950s and the end of the 20th century, but never published. The sector is located in the South-West corner of the city, right outside the wall line and the sanctuary dedicated to the Chthonian Deities, in an area dominating the Hypsas river. Here, the position of three kilns (A-C) was already known. Through non-invasive surveys (2017-2018) and to a first excavation campaign (2019), it was possible to conclude the investigation on other two kilns, kiln D – only partially brought to light until now – and kiln E. The workshop mainly produced Greek-Western amphoras along with banded and plain pottery, tiles, and terracotta figurines used in the nearby sanctuaries. The production context seems extremely interesting for the investigation of the workshop production of the colony during a period of great development and dynamism.

Polis and production in Akragas: an overview

According to the available data, the places of pottery production seems to concentrate in the Southern part, just outside the city and in proximity to the river valleys surrounding it (Lentini 2012; Parello 2014; Scalici 2019a).

The previous survey and the limited published data coming from the excavations detect the presence of two wide areas responsible for the production of pottery, located by the South-East and by the South-West corners, outside of Gates 3 and 5 (fig. 1).

As for the production area outside Gate 3, in proximity to *Akragas* river, the test pits and surveys outline a very articulated scenario with a life span continuing to the Roman age. From the opposite side of the city, the artisanal district outside Gate 5 seems to have in fact a more limited chronological range. The site is located in dominant position on the valley of the *Hypsas* river, in proximity to the Sanctuary of the Chthonian Deities, by the ditch of *Kolymbethra*; it has always attracted many scholars starting since the end of the XIX century, when G. E. Rizzo recovered and published a series of terracotta figurines reporting the news of having found a great amount of production markers (Rizzo 1897). A corpus of terracotta figurines coming from the Sanctuary and from the Southern area

of the walls was published by J. Bovio Marconi in the 30s of the XX century¹.

The investigation of the 50s (fig. 2) brought to light three ceramic kilns and a considerable accumulation of archaeological material dated by P. Griffo to 6th, 5th and 4th century BC (Griffo 1955), while a new test pit was carried out in 2000 by the Superintendency of Agrigento. Both researches remained basically unpublished, except for a small group of materials reporting the label “*area a sud delle mura*” (“Walls – Southern area”) inserted in the volume “Agrigento I”, edited by E. De Miro (De Miro 2000) and displayed at the Archeological museum in Agrigento.

In recent years, a research project was started in order to investigate further the overall knowledge of the production places for the *polis*. Within the project, the attention was concentrated on the artisanal area westward Gate 5, beginning a new investigation (fig. 3).

M.C.P.

¹ Marconi Bovio 1930. The terracotta figurines were discussed recently by C. Aleo Nero and E.C. Portale (2018).

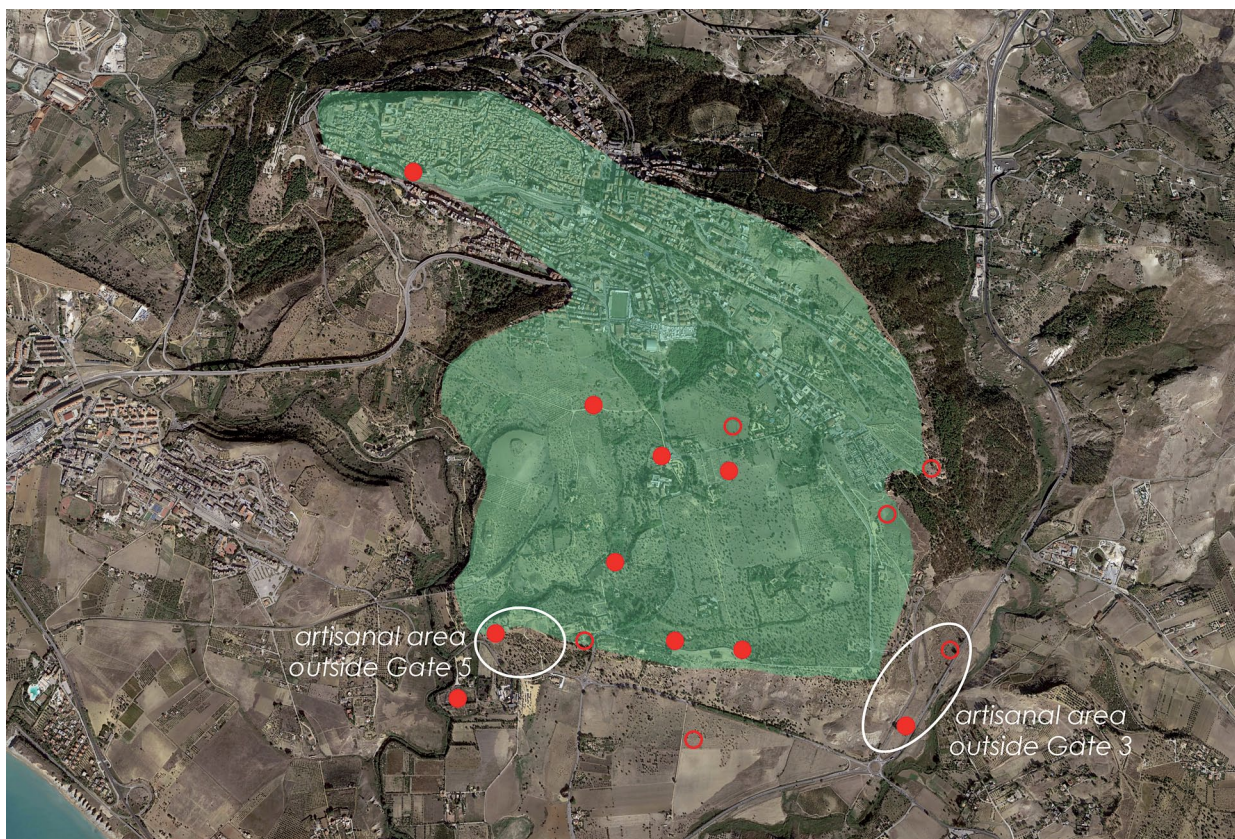


Fig. 1. The pottery production sites in Agrigento: full point sites with kiln, empty point sites without kiln (reworked by Scalici 2019a).

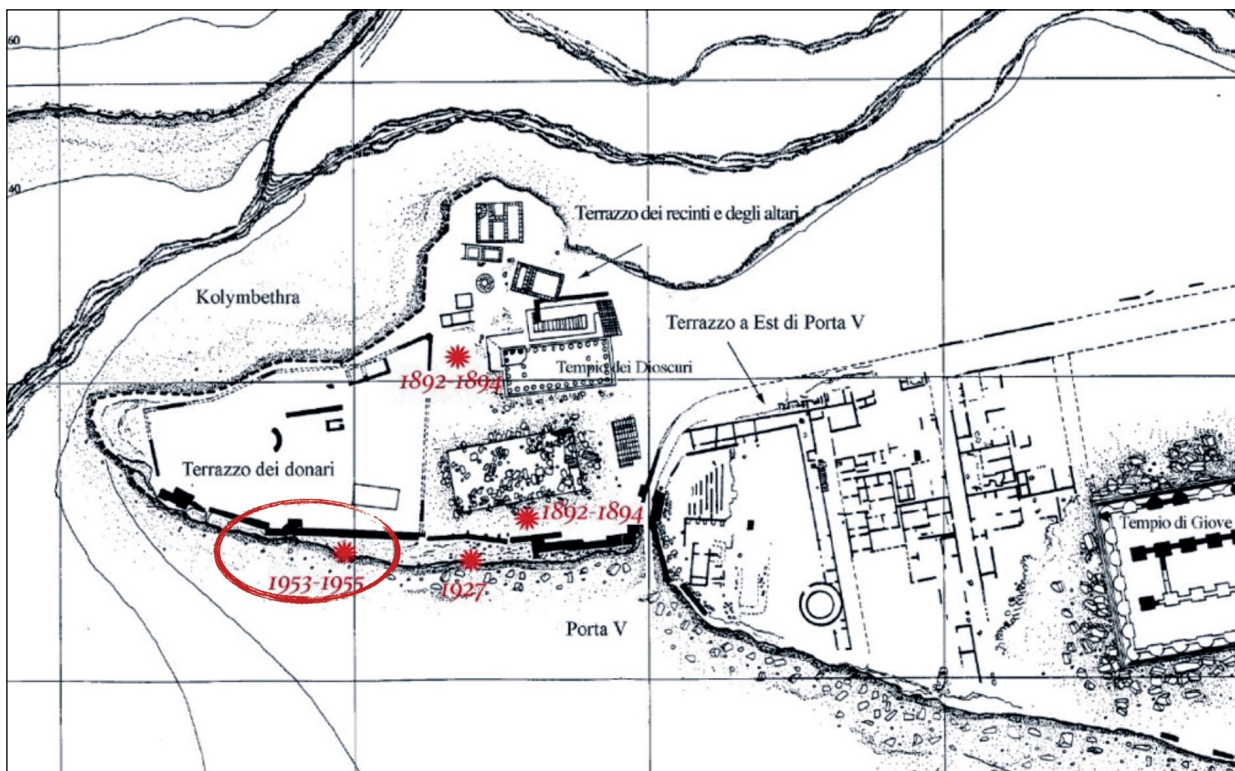


Fig. 2. Previous Researches (XIX-XX sec.): sites where the figurines come from (after Aleo Nero, Portale 2018).

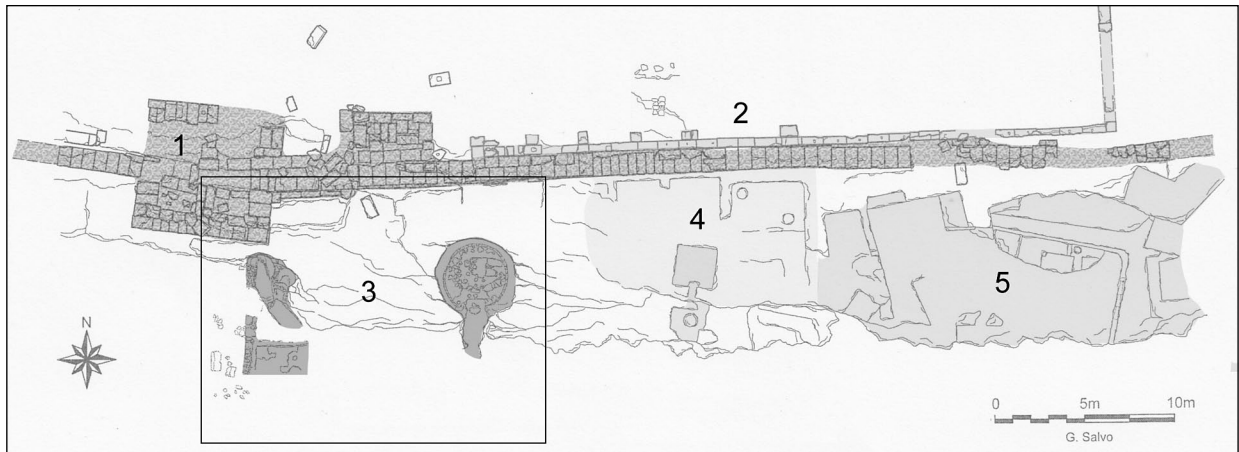


Fig. 3. The artisanal area outside Gate 5 after 1950s and 2000s excavations: 1) defensive tower; 2) shrine; 3) kilns; 4) grape press; 5) quarry; in the window the 2019 research's area (reworked by Scalici 2019a).

The new project on artisanal area outside Gate 5

New researches in the artisanal area outside Gate 5 were started by the Parco and the University of Bologna in the latest few years²: we began the systematic study of the area in 2017 and 2018, carrying out a laser scanning relief of those structures never investigated until then; we examined further a wider area with geophysical surveys. The results of these preliminary analysis were presented for the first time in the recent International Congress of Classical Archaeology of Cologne-Bonn (Scalici 2019a): in that occasion the furnaces brought to light in the 50s (kilns A-C) were examined, the three structures close to one another along with a fourth one (kiln D), only partially revealed before (fig. 4).

We also started a systematic study of kiln D in 2019, concentrating also on a fifth furnace (E), found with geomagnetic prospections.

The remarkable outputs of the first excavation campaign lead us to continue the investigation in the next years, extending the excavation to a wider portion of the producing area, in order to gain a better understanding of the articulation of the structure, the relationship among them and with the history and the development of the *polis*.

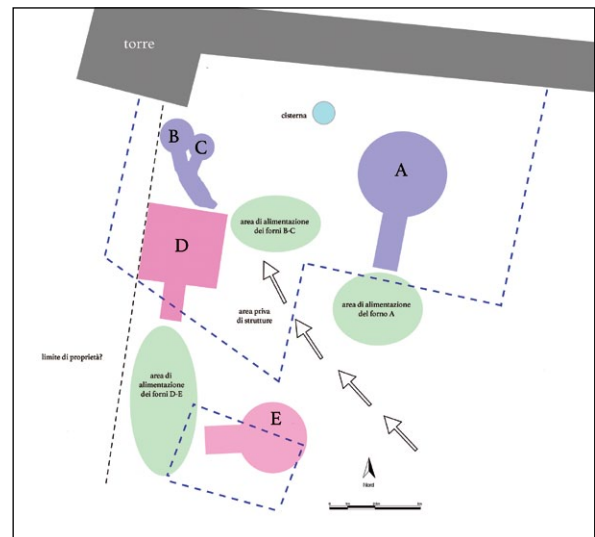


Fig. 4. Map of the 2019 research area (M. Scalici).

Presently, the area seems to be very large, although only a part of it has been already looked into. Its Eastern edge includes kiln A, apparently isolated from the other ones: it has a circular shape and it is entirely carved into the calcarenite rock, with a firing chamber 3,3 meters wide; inside it, we could recognize two different usage phases, the latter one provided a remarkable narrowing, with the partial removal of the stocking chamber (*prae-furnium*).

The other four furnaces (B-E) are located at the distance of about 6 meters: the space between furnaces B-E and furnace A lacks so far of structures, with the calcarenite bedrock and out-cropping clay. Furnaces B and C are also carved

² The excavations are directed by V. Baldoni (University of Bologna) and M.C. Parelo (Park "Valle dei Templi" of Agrigento) and coordinated by M. Scalici (University of Bologna). Several students from University of Bologna and volunteers attended at the dig, in particular S. Schilaci and U. Orlando who helped with the coordination and take care of the topography.



Fig. 5. Kiln D (Missione Archeologica Unibo Archive Photos).

into rock, but they are smaller, with combustion chambers at different quota and united stocking chambers³.

A little bit southward there is kiln D (figg. 5, 6): it has a quadrangular shape with a cooking chamber 3,30 meters wide, it is partially built above ground and partially cut in the clay bank⁴. Beside

the shape, some building characteristics are common to furnace A: the cooking chamber is isolated by the bank through a remarkable insulating coating layer of clay material; it is contained by cooked pats of clay, vitrified by the high temperatures and a plastering of earth mortar⁵. Both furnaces have got a perforated floor, sustained by equal-sized cooked bricks, implemented with a earth mortar binder. A unique central corridor crosses the walls with arches and allows the passage of the hot air. The similarities continue in the perforated floor which, although not well preserved in furnace D, is very similar in its shape and proportions to that one of furnace A.

Analyzing the area map we must observe that furnace D is earlier or coeval to furnaces B-C: as a matter of fact, the stocking chamber in furnaces B-C was built taking into consideration the one in furnace D.

The excavation of furnace D pointed out different phases in the structure usage, until its obliteration, which was provided by filling the cooking chamber with sand and stones. The Southern part of the cooking chamber and the stocking chamber do not seem to be very well preserved.

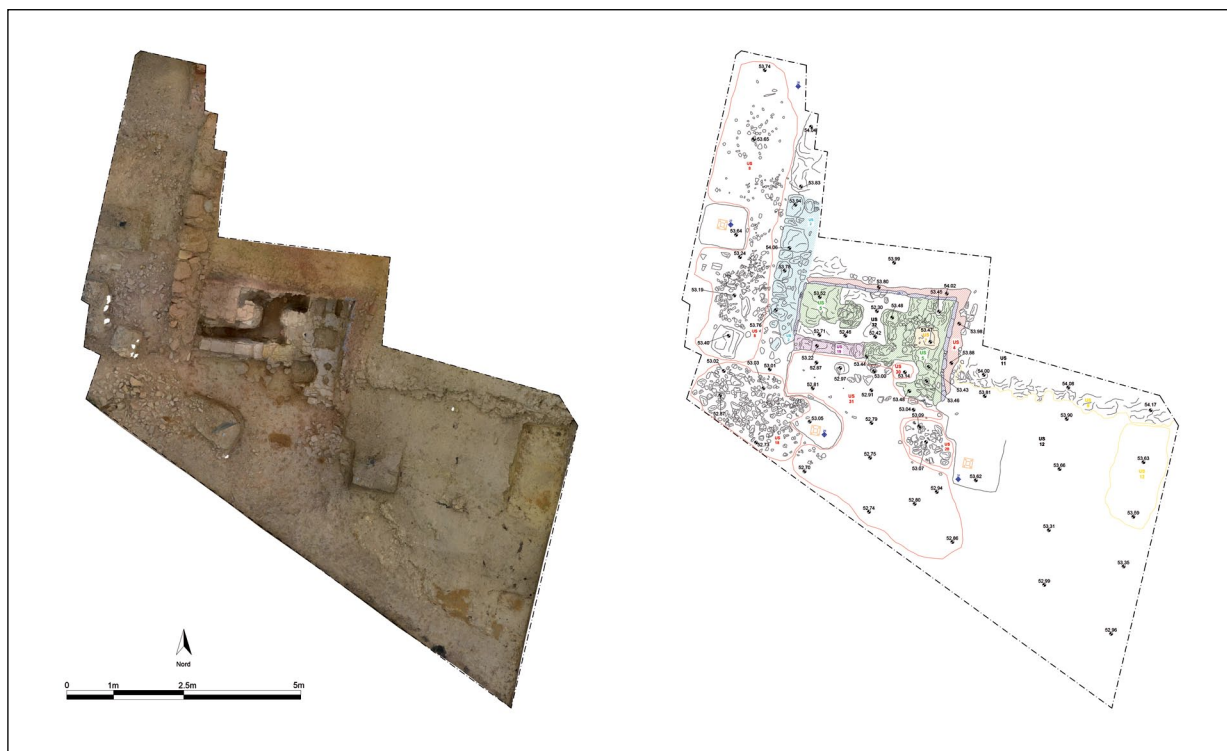


Fig. 6. Kiln D, photomap and plan (U. Orlando, S. Schillaci).

³ For the analysis of the kilns A-C see Scalici 2019a.

⁴ The kiln is of type *II b* of Cuomo di Caprio 2007: 524, fig. 169. For rectangular kiln see also Hasaki 2002: 165-176.

⁵ A similar plastering of earth mortar was identified also in a ceramic workshop in Entella: Guglielmino 2000, pp. 702-703, tav. CXXII, 2.

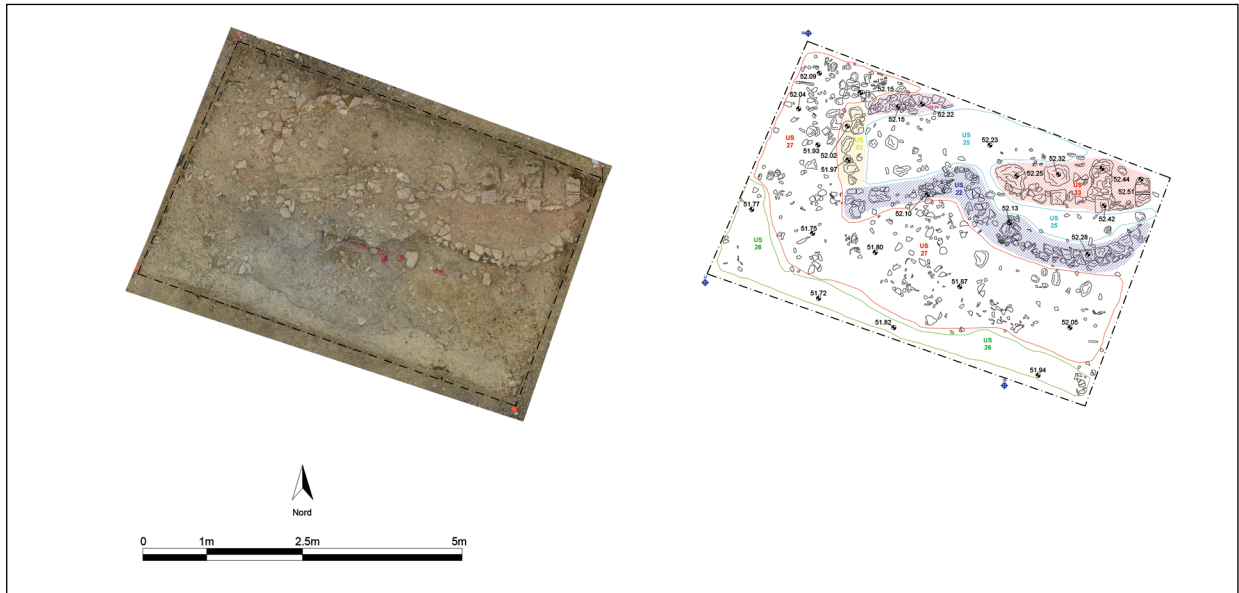
In the most Southern part of the considered area, there is a fifth furnace (E) (figg. 7, 8): it has a circular shape, considerable dimensions and it has some peculiarities, if compared to furnaces A-D⁶. At the moment, only the floor where the cooking chamber was based and the *praeurnium* - realized with fragments of bricks - were brought to light. The combustion chamber seems to be preserved and carved in the natural bedrock, but it has not yet been excavated.

The *praeurnium* is open westward, with a different orientation than the other furnaces, all open southward; likewise other structures, it has cooked brick walls, central corridors and a clayey coating layer.

The new investigations on the area allowed us to expand the knowledge on this important production sector, located just outside the walls, in the *proasteion* of the *polis*⁷, a very privileged position, functional to the artisanal activities. As a matter of fact, the furnaces were in strong proximity to an important road crossing Gate 5; this made the transportation of raw materials (wood, water, clay) and artifacts easier, so that the latter ones could be modeled elsewhere⁸. The location of the area, near the Sanctuary of the Chthonian Deities allows



Fig. 7. Kiln E (Missione Archeologica Unibo Archive Photos).



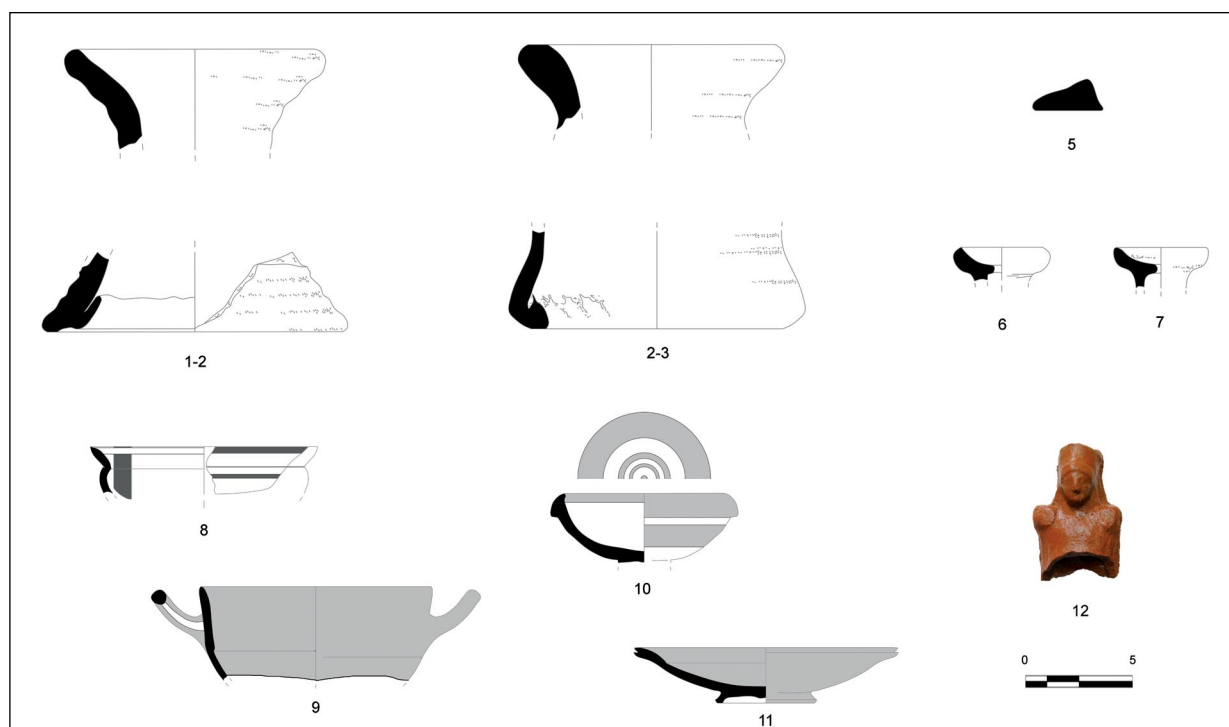


Fig. 9. Finds from the kilns D-E (M. Scalici).

the *polis* were built and the first structure of the monumental and urbanistic city was defined, with its walls and the sanctuary (see below the contribution by M. Scalici).

The artisanal area here investigated can be placed among the most ancient examples known in Sicily⁹ and it opens new research perspectives on the first phase of the *Akragas* colony.

V.B.

Pottery finds from the kilns

A considerable quantity of archaeological material comes from surface levels and from infill layers. For its greatest part, this material is absolutely compatible with the furnace area both from the functional and from the chronological point of view. We decided to divide such findings into three categories: the *instrumentum* connected with the artisanal area functioning, the wastes and the other findings, not necessarily related with the furnaces.

Kiln firing supports belong to the first category: made of non-refractory pottery, they all have marks of prolonged exposure to heat. They can be divided into cylindrical ring-like elements¹⁰, wedges¹¹ and supports with a shape like *lasana* (fig. 9.1-7) (Morris 1985).

Furnace wastes are rather fragmented, vitrified by the excessive exposure to heat; they often have bubbles and other shortcomings due to firing. They are all representative samples of the classes produced in the workshop. Attesting different percentages, it is possible to recognize the colonial painted pottery, coarseware, commercial amphorae, figurines and tiles¹² (figg. 9.9-12, 10-11).

Finally, the third category gathers all the materials not directly connected to the furnaces, including fragments of cups and *kotylai* of ionic type (fig. 9.8), Attic black-figured *lekythoi*, cooking ware, Corinthian, West-Greek and Punic commercial amphorae.

⁹ See Pisani 2012 for an overview of the pottery workshops in Sicily. For the recent discoveries in Selinunte: Bentz 2018; 2019.

¹⁰ Related to the types I-III of Cracolici 2004: 33-45.

¹¹ Type VI of Cracolici 2004: 49. See also Cuomo Di Caprio 1971-1972: 381; Guglielmino 2000: 703, tav. CXXI-II, 4; Bentz 2019: 158, fig. 10.

¹² Archaeometric analysis are in progress on samples taken from the pottery. These will be part of a Facem Project on the production of pottery in Agrigento coordinated by B. Bechtold.



Fig. 10. A banded *hydria* founded during the 2019 excavation (Missione Archeologica Unibo Archive Photos).

The furnace wastes, along with other findings coming from this area, supply scarce, yet significative elements to define the chronology of the workshop. The classes called “colonial banded ware” represent a smaller percentage of the total amount of the wastes (fig. 10). It is a production widespread throughout in the colonial world, painted with brown and red bands or with italic patterns, likely to be addressed to low-class people or for daily usage, anyway. The most recurrent shapes are *hydria*, *skyphos*, or the so-called “*skyphoid*”, a large cup reproducing the shape of a *skyphos*¹³. This class, common in archaic age, seems not to be attested anymore neither in Agrigento nor elsewhere, starting from the second quarter of the 5th century BC. A sample of small high-footed cup (stemmed dish), painted with grey bands, was also found¹⁴.

The class with the highest frequency is the coarseware (fig. 11). Although some not painted fragments can be confused with the banded class, the coarseware class has its own proper, well-defined shapes. Among the most attested shapes we can find the pouring vases: *olpai* (fig. 11.3) and mainly a kind of medium-sized jug (fig. 11.2),

rather common in the city levels belonging to 6th and 5th century BC¹⁵. Among the open shapes, *lekanis* (fig. 11.7) and mostly the basin with plane rim¹⁶ (fig. 11.11-12) and the carinated small cup with outwards lip¹⁷ (fig. 11.8). There are also mortars (fig. 11.14-15), spoons (fig. 11.9), cups, *skyphoi* (fig. 11.6), lids (fig. 11.7). On the other side, the less attested shapes are the *hydria* (fig. 11.1) and the *stamnos*¹⁸ (fig. 11.5), which could pertain to the banded class and the table amphorae reproducing the shape of the commercial ones. The presence of few fragments of *lekythoi* (fig. 11.10) is very interesting because they could be a strong indication of a local production of perfumes¹⁹.

Particularly, commercial amphorae called our attention. Wastes are of Western-Greek type, datable to the 5th century; they were reported on the Archaeological map, in the Southern area of the *polis* called *Piana di San Gregorio*, between the valleys of the two rivers *Akragas* and *Hypsas* (Lentini 2012), locally produced fragments from the city area also were known (Scalici 2019b). The diagnostic findings, handles and feet allow us to attribute them to two types, variation of the shape Sourisseau 3 and 4 (Sourisseau 2011, fig. 15) (2011, fig. 6)²⁰ (fig. 12). The most frequent one has rounded rim, with an internal air chamber and the flat top, it is not taller than 3,5 cm. The diameter of the mouth is around 16 cm, but there are some smaller pieces, about 14 cm, to be connected to fractional types (Sourisseau 2011: 195-197).

Some fragments of the wall show the junction of the neck on the shoulder, underlined by a strong distinction. The types seem to go through an evolution in the height of the rim and in the base profile leading to have a slender shape to which

¹³ Ingoglia 2013: 208-210, figg. 11-12. Bechtold 2008: 256, n. 115 with references (*skyphoid*). For Agrigento see De Miro 2000: 178, 288, catt. 533, 1955, fig. 112; De Miro 2003: 142-143; Baldoni 2019: 132, fig. 1 (*hydria*); 134, fig. 5 (*kotyle*). See Parelo, Cappuccino, Scalici in press.

¹⁴ The type was produced in Athens between 520 and 480 BC ca., long revived in the colonial areas in the same period, Sparkes, Talcott 1970: 138-140. For the diffusion of the banded one in Sicily see Famà 2002: 167-168 (C. Micheli) with previous bibliographical references; Bechtold 2008: 259, tav. XXIX, which assigns similar cups to the Sicilian Regional production.

¹⁵ They often have characteristic grooves on the outside of the mouth, De Miro 2000: 227-229, catt. 1247, 1271, fig. 110.

¹⁶ Sometimes it has two vertical handles like a basket, Sparkes, Talcott 1970: 215-216, nn. 1839-1843; De Miro 1988: T. 93.1. See Allegro 2008: 108, cat. 78, tavv. XLIII, (A. Amico); 166, cat. 672, tav. LXVI (F. Badagliacca).

¹⁷ De Miro 2000: cat. 2163, fig. 114; Panvini, Sole 2009: cat. VI/331 from Ravanusa, it dated around 510 BC (S. Nicotra).

¹⁸ De Miro 1989: 34, T. 1260, tav. XIX; 36, T. 1316, tav. XXV. Panvini, Sole 2009: 309, cat. VI/329 from Ravanusa, *stamnos* it dated around the end of 6th century BC (S. Nicotra).

¹⁹ Sparkes, Talcott 1970: 151-152, n. 1108, Deianeira globular body type produced from 550 BC. A similar typed is produced in Siracusa in the second half of 6th century BC, Panvini, Sole 2009: 335, cat. VI/430 (M. Musumeci).

²⁰ See also the typology proposed by V. Gassner (2003).



Fig. 11. Finds from the kilns D-E, coarseware (M. Scalici).

we might associate a chronological distinction. The types with the crushed hem seem to belong to the type 3 by Sourisseau while the ones with an elongated hem could be included among the most ancient variations for type 4, attested in Lipari, for example (Cavalier 1985, pp. 40-41, cat. 22, fig. 8c, pl. VII, a-b; pp. 44-45, cat. 27, fig. 8a, pl. IX, a e XI, b; p. 46, cat. 28, pl. IX, b). According to J.-Ch. Sourisseau, type 3 should however be dated between 490 and 450 BC, while type 4 should start around 450 BC (Sourisseau 2011: 191-192). Nevertheless, those materials found in the artisanal area in Agrigento, associated to amphorae as well as to wastes and importation fragments, depict a higher chronological perspective. Therefore, as a preliminary understanding, we believe that it is possible to date the most ancient types between the last quarter of the 6th and the beginning of

the 5th century, while the most recent and less frequent types could be dated down to the second quarter of the 5th century²¹.

This seems to be also the chronological span of the artisanal workshop, which was perhaps closed because of the increasing monumentalisation of the Sanctuary of Chthonian Deities and therefore moved toward the valley. The phase of 4th century BC indicated by other authors is not valuable at the moment if considering the materials coming from the latest excavations, but it could be consid-

²¹ Same dating (520-490 BC) for a similar type of Himera's production, Bechtold in press, fig. 3.2. Nevertheless, bases similar to our latest type are dated to the end of the 5th century BC, Bechtold, Vassallo, Ferlito 2019: 9, fig. 6.

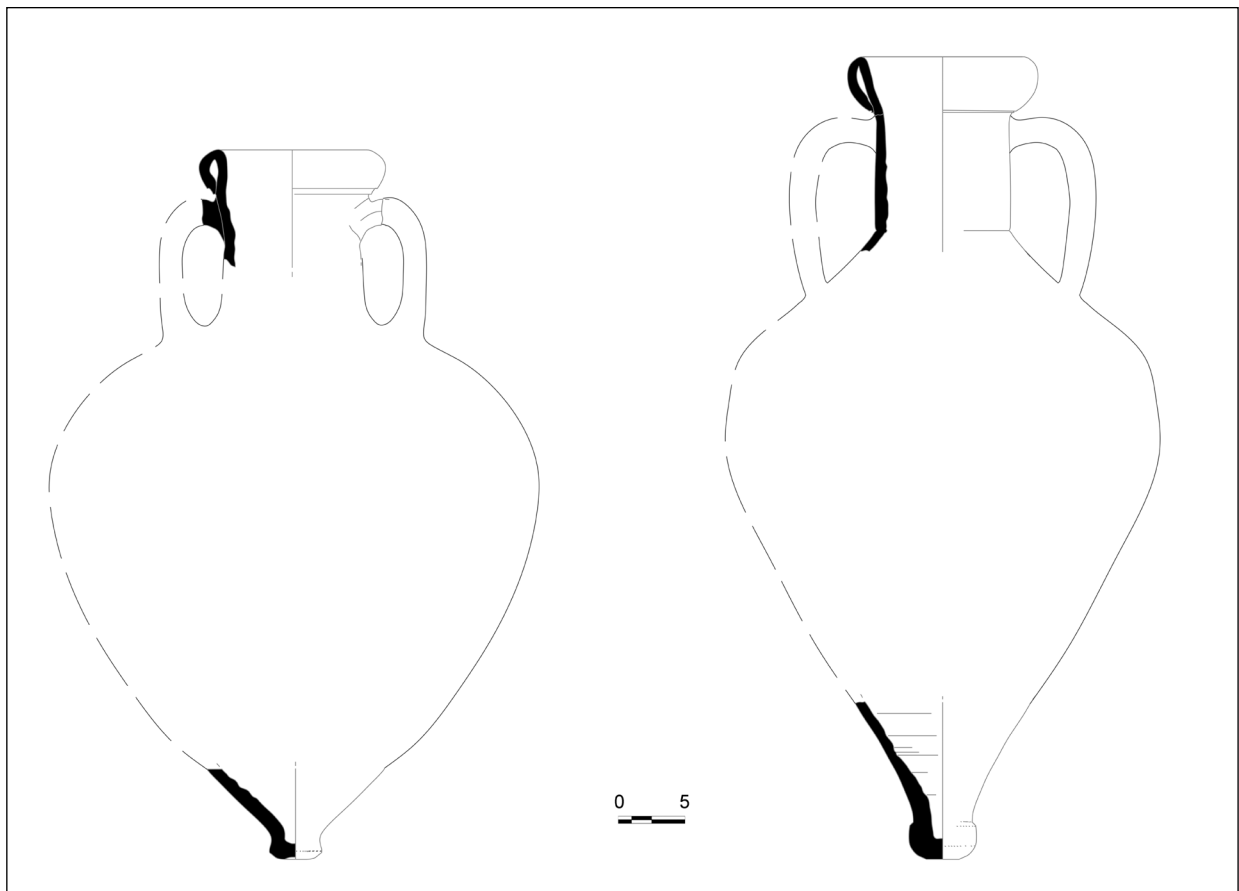


Fig. 12. Finds from the kilns D-E, amphorae (M. Scalici).

ered circumstantial for different phases of usage in the furnaces A-C. As already suggested by P. Griffo, we therefore confirm the contemporaneity of the workshop activity with the defensive walls of the *polis*, present in this point at least from the last quarter of the 6th century BC, according to G. Fiorentini (Fiorentini 2009: 41).

M.S.

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